

March 2010



A NOTE FROM DAVE

February went by in a hurry. Seems like yesterday when I was writing last month's article. This month I have three contributors to the news. COME ON guys, everyone should have something to talk about. Send in your latest news, project, idea or gossip; we need content to keep this newsletter interesting.

Robert is still doing a great job on the classes. Even on a cold Saturday, we had a great turnout in February. He will be holding class this Saturday, March 13, (delayed by Hamfest).

We went to Montgomery and picked up Pete's equipment and hope to have it set up soon. Also, most of you knew Dave Ingram, who passed away last month. His widow has contributed several very nice items to us.

John Outland and I attended the Orlando Hamfest. We got to visit with member Paul Rinehart, who lives in Sanford, FL and Ben Letson in St Petersburg.

Hope everyone can come join the fun (and help work) every Saturday at our Huffman shop. CU there.

Dave



DEE'S RADIO SHOWS

Well, another month has slipped past without hardly stirring up any dust. Boy, those things can go by so fast your head starts swimming, or maybe it's inner ear trouble. Can't never tell at my age. But the old radio shows haven't changed. I listened to an old Fibber McGee show last night that I don't remember ever hearing before. Isn't it nice to be able to forget something so completely? Now where did I put those glasses?

Below, check out the pictures of Mike Lord teaching us all about veneers: how to apply them, remove them, and how to patch them if the radio has a venereal disease. Ooooh, bad one. Maybe that'll bring out some of you folks hiding in the woodwork.



Most of you know that one of my many hobbies is OTR, but I have another one and that is bird watching. I hope to do a show one Monday evening about my little corner of the bird world. Below is a little ditty I did about one of my birds.

LJ the one eyed, one legged Towhee

It is my pleasure to introduce you to LJ the Towhee. He has one eye, and one leg, but he gets around as good as the other birds at my feeder. I named him after Long John Silver, the pirate in the story Treasure Island, although he had two good eyes. I must have been thinking of the other pirate with one eye. But, he had two legs. Oh well, what the heck, I'll named him LJ anyway.



I think that LJ probably had a run-in with a cat. We have lots of cats in our neighborhood, three of which belong to me. I have cat-proofed my bird feeding station with rabbit wire, so I don't think that LJ was attacked at my feeder. Towhees are ground feeders and are more likely to be caught by a cat or other ground predator.



This is Edith, his girlfriend. That's what I call her, but LJ calls her Soooooeet.

If it doesn't drift too far from the subject of antique radios, maybe in a future newsletter I can add some of the other bird pictures I've taken during this long cold winter. Or maybe a comment or two from Wallace Wimple of Fibber McGee and Molly fame about what he read in his Bird Book.

By for now,

Dee Haynes

243-4630 or k4hfx@bellsouth.net

What Do Those Radio Station Call Letters Mean?

By Don Keith (N4KC www.donkeith.com)

For Christmas, my wife gave me a very thoughtful gift, and one that would be appreciated by members of the Alabama Historical Radio Society. It was a Packard Bell Model 5FP broadcast radio, circa 1946. This small table-top radio features a carrying handle and a tough plastic case and, unlike many garage sale radios (that's where she found this little beauty), it actually works. (It loses some audio punch after it's been on for a while so I suspect I'll need to re-tube it. It uses common tubes so I should have no trouble replacing them).

But this limited foray into radio receivers by Packard Bell was most noted for its unique tuning dial. It actually lists the call letters of many of the more powerful AM radio stations of the time right there on the dial, in the spot on which their signals could be found. Interestingly, the radio was only distributed on the West Coast, so only stations in the far western USA are listed.

Well, this got me started to thinking about call letters. Many stations simply used those magical W- and K-callsigns that were issued to them randomly by the Federal Communications Commission or its predecessor, the Federal Radio Commission. Others, though, actually have some meaning and that was the reason for the stations requesting specific letters or coming up with phrases that tied in in some way.

For example, most of us have heard WSM booming in from Nashville on 650 kHz. Though most closely associated with one of the longest-running radio programs in history, "The Grand Ole Opry," few remember that it was once owned by an insurance company. An insurance company whose slogan was "We shield millions." "We Shield Millions." WLAC in Nashville, with its powerful signal, was once owned by the Life and Accident Insurance Company, thus its call letters.

The powerful WCFL in Chicago was owned at one time by a labor union, the Chicago Federation of Labor. Across town, another powerful station, WLS, was first put on the air by Sears & Roebuck, at that time proclaiming their Chicago outlet as the "World's Largest Store." (<http://www.wlshistory.com/WLS20/>)

Some origins are obvious. WCBS in New York is owned by the Columbia Broadcast System—CBS. WNBC, KNBC, WABC, KABC and so on are stations owned by ABC and NBC.

WWL in New Orleans was first put on the air in 1922 by the Jesuits at Loyola University, but only after special permission from the Vatican. It was actually declared to be a wireless laboratory, thus the “WL.” (I think their greatest hour in their almost 90-year history was their amazing work during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina when many stations were still off the air and communications were very limited. I listened to many hours of riveting coverage during those days.)

Many call signs are simply based on location. WACO is in Waco, Texas, and is one of the few stations that go against the generally accepted rule of stations east of the Mississippi River holding a call sign beginning with a W and those west of the river starting with K. WASH is in Washington, DC. WBAL is in Baltimore. WNOX at 990 is in Knoxville, Tennessee. I suppose KNOX was taken already, or the FCC decided to stick to its guns about that Mississippi River thing. (I had the pleasure of working for that station for a while and it has quite a history, including a live country music radio show that actually pre-dates “The Grand Ole Opry,” “The Tennessee Barn Dance.” Dolly Parton, Chet Atkins, Archie Campbell and many others got their start there on WNOX.)

Closer to home, most AHRS members know that WAPI 1070 AM here in Birmingham gets its name from Alabama Polytechnic Institute, the former name of Auburn University. Many of us grew up listening to WSGN, a set of call letters now being used by the National Public Radio station in Gadsden. That station was once owned by the *Birmingham Age Herald* newspaper, which billed itself as “The South’s Greatest Newspaper.”

There are interesting stories about the call letters of another station where I once worked, WVOK—now all-sports WSPZ. That set of call letters now belongs to an FM station in East Alabama, but back in the ‘50s and ‘60s, WVOK was “The Mighty 690,” booming 50,000 watts from its tower and studios in Midfield. The station was as well known for its Shower of Stars concerts as for its rock and roll music and long-time personality Joe Rumore.

But rumor has it that in the early 1960s, at the height of the Civil Rights movement in Birmingham, the station was notably biased in its news coverage and gained the moniker “Voice of the Klan.”

I can only confirm that the station was owned by Voice of Dixie, Inc. and used the slogan “The Voice of Dixie” on the air. When they first built the station and tried to get call letters way back in the late ‘40s, WVOD was taken, so they took the closest available. I can also confirm that during my time there—from 1968 through 1976—we worked hard to cover the news accurately and without bias. We also won a number of awards from United Press International and the Associated Press. We even received the very first Troy University Hector Award for Innovation in Journalism for our weather coverage and notification system.

So, next time you dial around on that beautifully restored radio and hear a set of call letters announced, think about why that particular combination was chosen. There could be a story there!

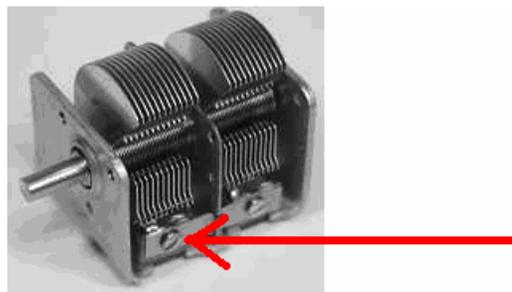
(Former broadcast personality Don Keith is author of over twenty books. His latest is WAR BENEATH THE WAVES, to be released at the end of March. It tells the story of an American submarine caught in a vicious depth-charge attack in WWII, an incident that brings out the worst but also the very best in its crew, and details why those heroes went unrecognized for over 60 years. Don's web site is www.donkeith.com. He is also an active amateur radio operator, with the call sign N4KC, which has no special meaning at all.)

Thanks to **Donald O. Patterson** for the following hint about cleaning plastic knobs.

Grungy Knob Cure

Are you faced with grungy plastic knobs such you often find on Motorola and Philcos? There is a simple cure. Use dishwashing detergent such as Calgonite and soak the knobs until the mildew or grunge comes off. Use a brush if necessary. Be sure you include the back of the knob or wherever there is evidence of the fungus. When the knob is thoroughly dry, coat the surfaces with polyurethane, either satin or gloss, depending on what the knob looked like before the cleaning. Do this immediately, as some of these will return to the same condition fairly quickly.

Don't Touch That Dial...Or How to Adjust the Dial Pointer of an All American Five Radio by Joe Minor, K4JOE



Main tuning Air Variable Capacitor
Front Plates = Osc Back Plates = Antenna

Remove all power to the radio.

Adjust the dial pointer so the minimum is at the 550 kc (low end) position and the maximum is at the 1600 kc (or top end) position. Rotate the Tuning Knob from minimum to maximum several times to make sure that the “pointer” travels from minimum to maximum on the dial.

Now it is time to turn the radio on.

Let the radio warm up for about 15 minutes or so. Next, move the tuning knob to a radio station (Or use a signal generator) close to the center of the band. Adjust the SCREW on the oscillator that is mounted on the main tuning Air Variable Capacitor (see picture), so that the known radio station (or signal generator) is the same as the dial “pointer”.

Now the dial “pointer” should read the same frequency that the radio station is on, and should be accurate from 550 kc to 1600 kc. If you are adjusting the FM, use the same procedure but make sure you use the FM oscillator adjustment screw.

Want to learn more, come to Robert’s class on the first Saturday of each month. See you there.

MEETING TIMES

We meet nearly every Saturday of the month at 09:00 at the Alabama Power Building on Parkway East (aka Centerpoint Parkway) in Huffman. The organization’s space is accessed from the rear of the building, so park around the back (by means of Huffman Road, which runs parallel to the Parkway). Entry is via the door on the right.

Come to the Monday Night Meetings, TOO, on the 4th Monday of the month at 7 PM!

FREE ELECTRONICS CLASSES

The first Saturday of the month, there are electronics classes free to members. Topics include test equipment, Resistors and Capacitance testing, Inductors and coil winding, to name only a few subjects!

We hope to see you there!



DUES ARE NOW DUE

Membership dues are \$25 a year, payable **beginning in January**. If you have questions about your dues, you can contact Tom at 205-967-7000.

Dues can be mailed to AHRs @ P.O. Box 131418, Birmingham AL 35213.

WHO TO CONTACT

President – David Cisco

205.822.6759

ciscod@bellsouth.net

Member and Instructor – Robert Frye

205.631.6680

RLF100243@aol.com

Web site – Bob Lovell

bob@dixiewebdesigns.com

Web Address:

<http://alabamahistoricalradiosociety.org/>

Newsletter – Patsy Desaulniers

patwrite@gmail.com